

OPPENHEIM

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1918
MAIN

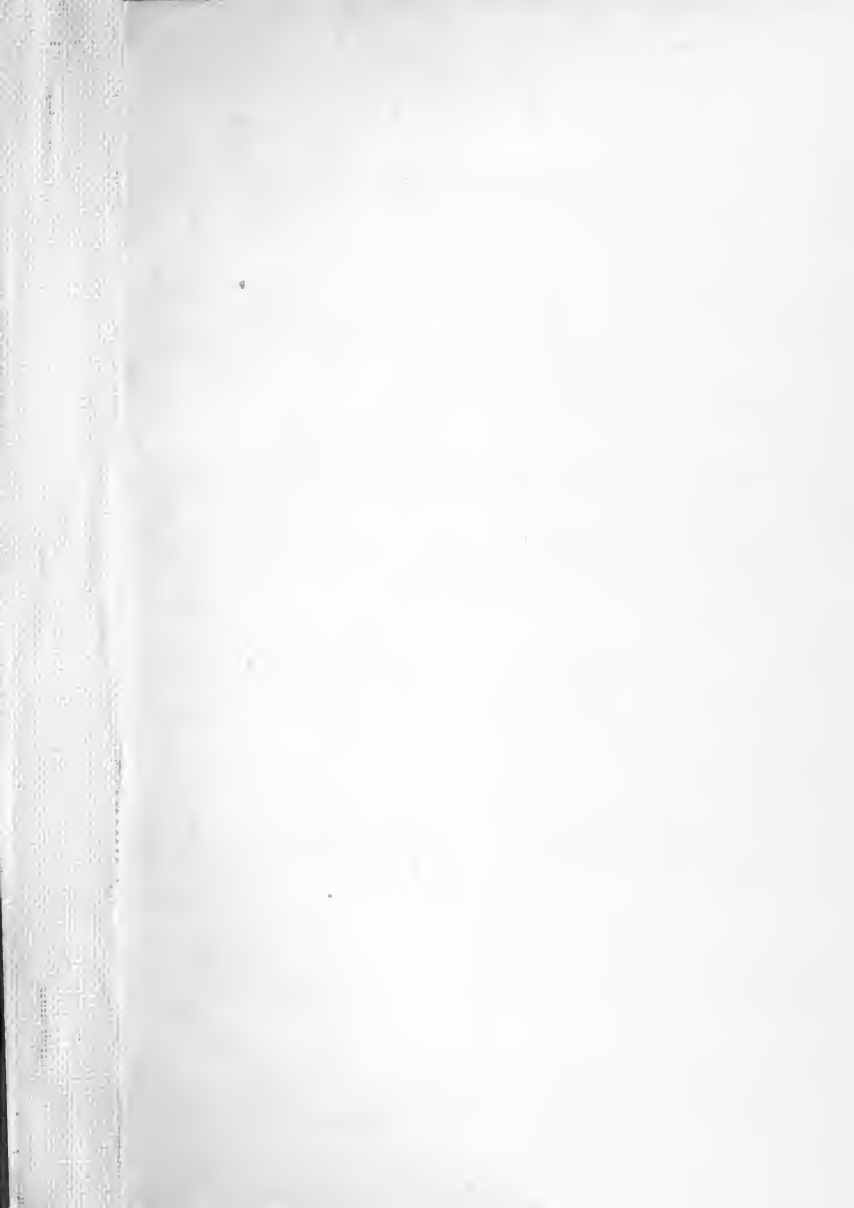
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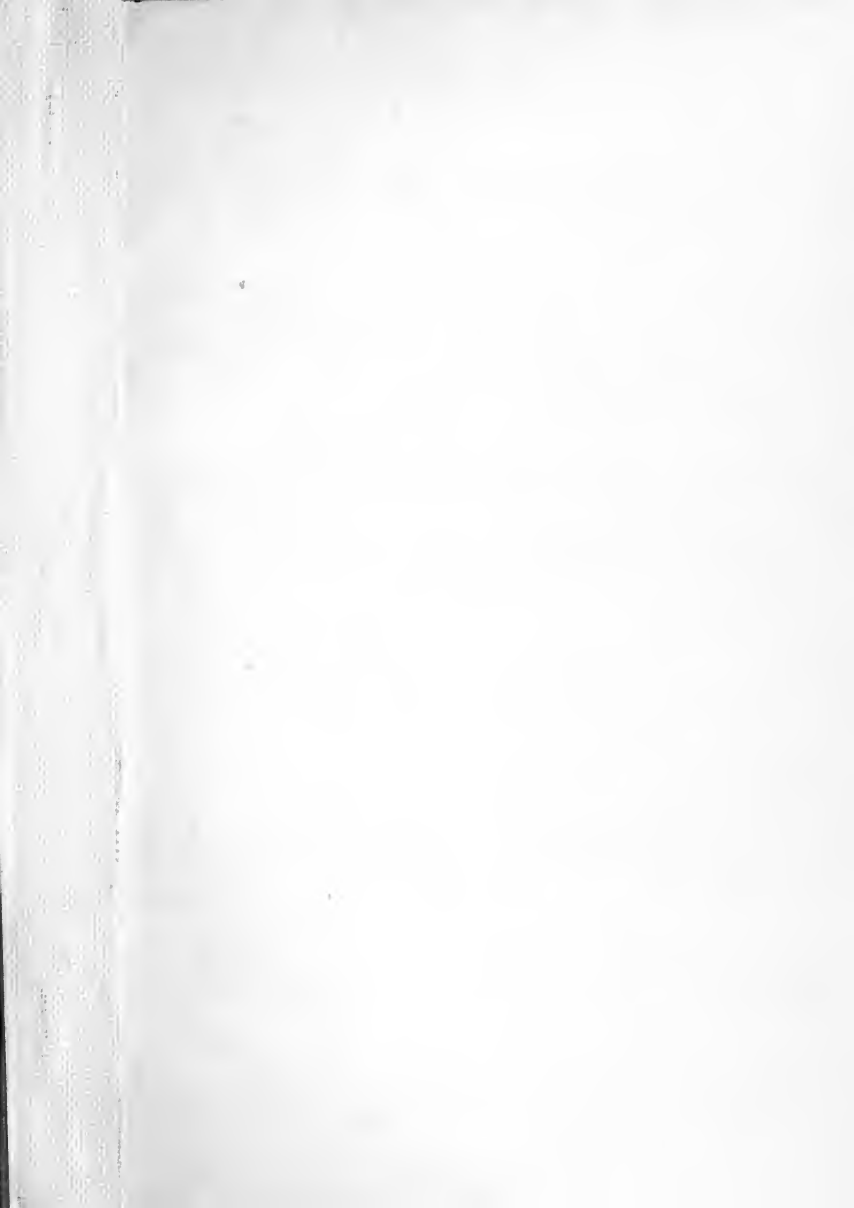
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FLYING STAG PLAYS

NO. 2

NIGHT

JAMES OPPENHEIM



FRONT APENS

NEW YORK



N I G H T ∇ ∇ *A Poetic
Drama in One Act* by James
Oppenheim as played by the
Provincetown Players.

Published by EGMONT ARENS at the
Washington Square Bookshop ∇ New York
1918

NIGHT was first produced by the Provincetown Players on November 2nd, 1917, with the following cast:

THE SCIENTIST	-	-	-	-	<i>Justus Sheffield</i>
THE POET	-	-	-	-	<i>George Cram Cook</i>
THE PRIEST	-	-	-	-	<i>Hutchinson Collins</i>
THE MAN	-	-	-	-	<i>Rollo Peters</i>
THE WOMAN	-	-	-	-	<i>Ida Rauh</i>

The scene and method of playing, suggested by Rollo Peters. The actors appear in silhouette before a lighted blue screen upon a simple mound that suggests a hill-top.

NIGHT

A Priest, A Poet, A Scientist.

Hilltop, in October; the stars shining.

[The Priest kneels; the Scientist looks at the heavens through a telescope; the Poet writes in a little note-book.]

THE PRIEST

When I consider Thy heavens, the work of
Thy fingers, the moon and the stars,
which Thou hast ordained;
What is man, that Thou art mindful of him,
And the son of man, that Thou visitest him?

THE SCIENTIST

Algol which is dim, becomes again a star of
the second magnitude.

THE POET

My beloved is far from this hilltop, where the
firs breathe heavily, and the needles fall;
But from the middle of the sea
She, too, gazes on the lustrous stars of calm
October, and in her heart
She stands with me beneath these heavens—
daintily blows
Breath of the sighing pines, and from the
loaded and bowed-down orchards and
from the fields
With smokes of the valley, peace steps up on
this hill.

THE PRIEST

Thou art the Shepherd that strides down the
Milky Way;
Thou art the Lord, our God: glorified be Thy
name and Thy works.
I see Thee with Thy staff driving the star-
sheep to the fold of dawn.

PS 3529

P6 N5

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THE SCIENTIST

The Spiral Nebula in Ursa Major, that forever
turns
Slowly like a flaming pin-wheel...thus are
worlds born;
Thus was the sun and all the planets a hand-
ful of million years ago.

THE POET

She is far from me...but in the cradle of the
sea
Sleepless she rocks, calling her beloved: he
heeds her call:
On this hilltop he picks the North Star for his
beacon...
For by that star the sailors steer, and beneath
that star
She and I are one in the gaze of the heavens.

THE PRIEST

[Slowly rising and turning to the others.]
Let us glorify the Creator of this magnificence
of infinite Night,
His footstool is the Earth, and we are but the
sheep of this Shepherd.

THE SCIENTIST

Thus shall we only glorify ourselves,
That of this energy that rolls and drives in
suns and planets
Are but the split-off forces with cunning
brains,
And questioning consciousness...Pray if you
must—
Only your own ears hear you, and only the
heart in your breast
Responds to the grandiose emotion...See
yonder star?
That is the great Aldebaron, great in the
night,

Needing a whole sky, as a vat and a reservoir,
which he fills with his flame...
But no astronomer with his eye to his lenses
Has seen ears on the monster.

THE PRIEST

Thou that hast never seen an atom, nor the
ether thou pratest of,
Thou that hast never seen the consciousness
of man,
What knowest thou of the invisible arms
about this sky,
And the Father that leans above us?

THE POET

We need know nothing of any Father
When the grasses themselves, withering in
October, stand up and sing their own
dirges in the great west wind,
And every pine is like a winter lodging house
where the needles may remember the
greenness of the world,
And the great shadow is jagged at its top
with stars,
And the heart of man is as a wanderer look-
ing for the light in a window,
And the kiss and warm joy of his beloved.

THE PRIEST

Man of Song and Man of Science,
Truly you are as people on the outside of a
house,
And one of you only sees that it is made of
stone, and its windows of glass, and that
fire burns in the hearth,
And the other of you sees that the house is
beautiful and very human,
But I have gone inside the house,
And I live with the host in that house
And have broken bread with him, and drunk
his wine,

And seen the transfiguration that love and
awe make in the brain...
For that house is the world, and the Lord is
my host and my father:
It is my father's house.

THE SCIENTIST

He that has gone mad and insane may call
himself a king,
And behold himself in a king's palace, with
feasting, and dancing women, and with
captains,
And none can convince him that he is mad,
Slave of hallucination...
We that weigh the atom and weigh a world in
the night, and we
Who probe down into the brain, and see how
desire discolors reality,
And we that see how chemical energy changes
and transforms the molecule,
So that one thing and another changes and so
man arises—
With neither microscope, nor telescope, nor
spectroscope, nor finest violet ray
Have we found any Father lurking in the in-
tricate unreasonable drive of things
And the strange chances of nature.

THE POET

O Priest, is it not enough that the world and
a Woman are very beautiful,
And that the works and tragic lives of men
are terribly glorious?
There is a dance of miracles, of miracles hold-
ing hands in a chain around the Earth
and out through space to the moon, and
to the stars, and beyond the stars,
And to behold this dance is enough;
So much laughter, and secret looking, and
glimpses of wonder, and dreams of ter-
ror...
It is enough! it is enough!

THE PRIEST

Enough? I see what is enough!
Machinery is enough for a Scientist,
And Beauty is enough for a Poet;
But in the hearts of men and women, and in
the thirsty hearts of little children
There is a hunger, and there is an unappeas-
able longing,
For a Father and for the love of a Father...
For the root of a soul is mystery,
And the Night is mystery,
And in that mystery men would open inward
into Eternity,
And know love, the Lord.
Blessed be his works, and his angels, and his
sons crowned with his glory!

[*A pause. The Woman with a burden in her
arms comes in slowly.*]

THE WOMAN

Who has the secret of life among you?

THE PRIEST

I, woman, have that secret:
I have learned it from the book of the revela-
tions of God,
And I have learned it from life, bitterly,
And from my heart, holily.

THE SCIENTIST

Be not deceived, woman:
There is only one book of reality—the book
of Nature.

THE WOMAN

Who has read in that book?

THE SCIENTIST

I have read a little:
No man has read much.

THE POET

They lead you nowhere, woman;
You are the secret of life, and your glory is in
 seeking the secret,
But finding it never.

THE WOMAN

I have climbed this hill and found three
 watchers of the night—
Three star-gazers perched above the placid
 October harvests
Where they lie golden and crimson along the
 valley, and high on the slopes
The scarlet maples flame—
You are a priest: and you speak of God.
I am nothing but need: for I carry a burden
 that is heavier than the Earth, and is
 heavier
Than the flesh of woman can bear: I break
 Down under it: and a hard hate
Against my birth is steel in my heart—I curse
God, if there be a God—
Love, if there ever was love—
Life, that is empty ravings,
And the hour when I was born.

THE PRIEST

Peace! Peace! Thou standest in the presence
 of the Night
Shadowy with grace and benediction—the
 mercy
Of the Lord falls like the dew on the soft
 brow of thy affliction!

THE POET

[Softly.]

She is very beautiful and dark with her stern
 cursing,
Standing there like an enemy of great Je-
 hovah,

A demon-woman satanic—she is very beautiful,
With her arms full of her burden, and the stars
Seeming to retreat before her.

THE SCIENTIST

What burden is that you carry?

THE WOMAN

That which is worth nothing,
And worth more than these stars you gaze at.

THE PRIEST

Put thy burden upon the Lord, and thy trust
in His loving kindness.

THE WOMAN

I will not part with my burden, though it is
worth nothing...
For what are a few pounds of dead flesh
worth when the life has left it?

THE PRIEST

Then you carry the dead at your breast?

THE WOMAN

I carry the dead...

THE PRIEST

Flesh of your flesh and bone of your bone...

THE WOMAN

My breasts are still heavy with unsucked
milk...

THE PRIEST

Your child has died...

THE WOMAN

My baby is dead...

THE PRIEST

The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away;
Blessed be the name of the Lord.

THE WOMAN

Nine long months
I ripened with the human seed, and like a
 goodly tree that is green
Stooped with sheltering boughs above the
 swelling fruit...
Song rang sweetly in my blood...
I tasted the silent life as a spring hillside
 where the furrows are run
So holds its bated breath against the pressing
 of the grass-blades
That birds coming that way catch the held-
 down glory under the furrows
And scatter ecstatic golden notes in the morn-
 ing light...
Until the trumpets blasted, as if the opening
 heavens of a sunrise
Were battalions of bright trumpeters blowing
 news of dawn...
Sank I then into darkness,
Sank I then into terror,
Till I was healed of pain by the new-born, my
 child...
And now, behold in my arms
The life of my life:
All that I was went out in him: my life was
 now outside me.

THE PRIEST

Unto thee a son was born!

THE WOMAN

I ran to tend him with glad feet, and with
 laughter...
For my life was now outside of me,
And I was seeking my life.

THE PRIEST

You praised the Lord?

THE WOMAN

I loved my child...

THE PRIEST

And God forgotten?

THE WOMAN

That child was holy...

THE PRIEST

He was but flesh...

THE WOMAN

Just so was Christ...

THE PRIEST

A Son of God...

THE WOMAN

My child was such...

THE PRIEST

So in the corrupt new generations of men
They forget God, and love but the flesh,
And the corruptible flesh decays after its kind
And in their bereavement they have nothing
...then in their sorrow
They curse the true and the good.

THE WOMAN

The flesh, you say? Here is the flesh:
But was it the flesh when his blue eyes
opened and gazed with great hunger,
Was it the flesh that wailed, the flesh that
warmed against my naked breasts, the
flesh
That went a secret way, and I after, I after,
seeking through embraces
To catch my son back, hold him:...but, oh,
he was gone,
He was gone, leaving *this*. Priest, is this all
you have for the bereaved?

THE PRIEST

That which is gone is now with God.

THE WOMAN

I was his God, for to me the beautiful bright
life raised its hands,
Suppliant, full of faith...
He wailed for enfolding love: I gave it
For daily bread: I gave it
For healing and shelter: I gave it.
Out of me he came, but away from me he has
gone,
And if he has found out some other mother,
I curse her in my jealousy!

THE PRIEST

So you blaspheme the holiness of the Omnipotent!

THE WOMAN

So I curse the thief who stole my treasure
away.

THE PRIEST

Alas! Who may speak to a sacrilegious generation?

THE WOMAN

Speak if you can, and tell me in a few words
What is the secret of life?

THE PRIEST

Life is a mysterious preparation for immortality...
We are sons and daughters of God, who shall
later be angels, and in heaven
Know bliss beyond all dream.

THE WOMAN

[Uncovering her child's face.]

My son...

You and I lately pulsed with one pulse, and
sang together one song:

For you the flaming pain, for you the terror
of birth...

And this priest's God let you suffer, in a
glorious preparation,

And let you die...

[Kisses him.]

Cold! Cold! My heart tightens hard, my
blood is chilled...

[In a loud cry.]

Hellish heaven! Devilish God!

*[Silence. The Poet advances and covers the
face.]*

THE POET

You are very wonderful and very noble in
your satanic anger,

Your curses are cleansing, for it is a mighty
thing for man to confront creation

Greater even than this vast Night, to stand in
his transiency

And his pitiful helplessness, and in the grasp
of his doom, and against death,

Darkness, and mysterious powers, alone of
all life

Godlike, downing the universe with defiance!
O godlike

Are you; and you *are* God!

THE WOMAN

[Gazing at him.]

Who are you, with these words?

THE POET

Seer and singer, one who glories in life, and
through vision

Creates his own worlds.

THE WOMAN

Has your mother ever wept for you?

THE POET

All mothers weep...

THE WOMAN

Have you ever had a child?

THE POET

No child of my own: but I know the love of
children.

THE WOMAN

Can I trust you with a great trust?

THE POET

I think of you as a holy thing.

THE WOMAN

Then—take this a moment,
And feel how light a heavy burden may be.
[*She carefully places the child in his arms.*]

THE POET

How strangely light!

THE WOMAN

You tremble. Why?

THE POET

There is something so real in the stiff posture
of these tiny legs,
These crooked arms, this little body,
This hanging head...

THE WOMAN

Can you see him?

THE POET

[*Looking close.*]
O tiniest budding mouth,
O dark deep fringes of eyelids,
O pallid cheeks...

THE WOMAN

And the little tuft of hair—you see it?

THE POET

Take him! My heart is in despair!

THE WOMAN

No one will have my burden; for my burden
is heavier

Than any save a mother can bear... O Earth,
hard Earth,

I shall not go mad: I hold back: I shut the
doors on the Furies:

I stand straight and stiff! I hold against my
heart with words!

[*Silence.*]

So, poet, you are hushed! Life is too much
for you!

Go—live in your dreams and let the reality of
experience

Flow over you, untasted... You are wise: it is
better!

[*Silence.*]

What? All silent? My star-gazers brought
to a pause?

You, too?

THE SCIENTIST

[*Grimly.*]

Who would listen to me must be hard and
strong.

THE WOMAN

Am I soft and weak?

THE SCIENTIST

You have the strength of revolt, but not the
greater strength of acceptance.

THE WOMAN

What shall I accept?

THE SCIENTIST

The inexorable facts of life.

THE WOMAN

And what are those facts?

THE SCIENTIST

That man is no more than the grasses, and
that man is no more,
Though his dreams are grandiose, than the
pine on this hill, or the bright star
Burning blue out yonder—strangely the
chemicals mix, and the forces interplay,
And out of it consciousness rises, an energy
harnessed by energies,
And a little while it burns, then flickers, then
vanishes out,
And is no more than the October wind and
the smell of dried hay.

THE WOMAN

These are the facts?

THE SCIENTIST

These are the facts.

THE WOMAN

And my child was nothing but energy, gathered and scattered?

THE SCIENTIST

These are the facts. . .

THE WOMAN

He was only a cunning engine and a curious machine?

THE SCIENTIST

Thus are we all. . .

THE WOMAN

Not all. . . thus are *you*. . .
But this child was mine, he was my baby and
he was my son.

And I was his life-giver, and his lover, and his
mother. . .
And I knew the glory of this child, for I lived
with it,
And I know the marvel and mystery of moth-
erhood, for I lived it. . .
I lived it, who now live the death of a treas-
ured being,
And who know now that the light of the world
is out, and only death
May heal me of anguish, and only death's long
sleep
Shall bury my bereavement in peace. . . O
mouthers of words,
Dreamers who do not live, I go back to the
valley,
And there I shall put this babe in the Earth
where the seeds of Autumn are sinking,
And there I shall slay myself, knowing that
no one knows,
And no one helps, and life is a madness and a
horror,
And to be dead is better than to suffer.

*[They say nothing. The Priest silently prays.
The Woman turns, and starts slowly out.
But as she goes a Man enters, search-
ingly.]*

THE MAN

Beloved! O where have you fled from me?

THE WOMAN

Go back—I hate you for bringing this being
into life,
Whose loss has ruined life, life itself: and I
had better never loved you,
For love brings children to the mother.

THE MAN

It is my child, too. . . I too have lost him.

THE WOMAN

You have lost a plaything and the promise of
a man,
And you have lost a trouble and a burden:
But I have lost my love, and I have lost the
life of my life.

THE MAN

You are cruel in your sorrow beyond all
women...

THE WOMAN

Then leave me, and seek comfort elsewhere.
There are many women.

THE MAN

You are desperate, and there is a hardness in
you that makes me afraid.
Where are you going?

THE WOMAN

I follow this child.

THE MAN

Then I lose *my* child... even as you lost yours.

THE WOMAN

Your child? Ha! I am gone!
[Tries to pass him; he seizes her.]

THE MAN

You shall not go, for you are mine. O be-
loved, hear me!

THE WOMAN

Take away your hands, for every moment that
you make me stay
Deepens my hate of you.

THE MAN

You would break my life in bits?

THE WOMAN

Your life is not so easily broken...
You are a man... Come! I shall do some terrible thing—

THE MAN

Then I too shall follow...

THE WOMAN

Follow? Where?

THE MAN

Wherever you go.

THE WOMAN

Down into death?

THE MAN

Even into death.

[A pause; she draws back a little.]

THE WOMAN

Are you crying? Are there tears on your cheeks?

Why do you heave so?

THE MAN

Your love has died...

THE WOMAN

Are you so weak?

THE MAN

But I need you so...

THE WOMAN

[In a changed voice.]

You need me!

THE MAN

Look! I do not need you, who am alone,
uncomforted,
With no place on Earth, no life, no light, if
you are gone...

THE WOMAN

You need me?

THE MAN

I need you...

[*Silence.*]

THE WOMAN

This man is my child...

[*Silence.*]

THE MAN

[*Drawing her tenderly close.*]

Our dead child between us,

O my beloved, is there not a future?

May no more children issue from us, no more
children

Lovely, golden, waking with laughter, and
clothed as with dawn

With the memory of the dead? Come, my
beloved,

Down to the Valley, down to the living, down
to the toilers.

Come, my beloved! I am your child and your
father,

Your husband and your lover! Come, let us
go!

THE WOMAN

[*Weeping.*]

O my heart!

Something has broken in me, and the flood
flows through my being!

I come! I come!

[*They go out together, the Man with his arm
around the Woman.*]

THE PRIEST

Forgive these children, Lord God!

THE SCIENTIST

Ignorance is indeed bliss!

THE POET

The secret of life?

He gives it to her, she gives it to him. . .

But who shall tell of it? Who shall know it?

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For The Little Theatre

No. 2

NIGHT



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